

CATTLE AND THE ANCESTOR CULT

173

to the method of rearing calves by letting them take all the milk they wanted, and partly to the practice of letting the herd-boys have the rest. In villages under a *mulumuzana* of a Swazi clan, who had a wife in his big house also of a Swazi clan, the consumption of milk was to some extent organized. These senior women saw that the herd-boys brought them a certain amount of milk each day, and they gave it to young children or invalids, and made some into *amasi*.

Another practice which restricted the use of meat and milk as regular items of diet was that the building up of the herds was regarded as a primary responsibility of the owners and guardians of cattle. Hence calves were given milk, which in western countries would be drawn off for human use, and the killing of beasts, unless they were sick, was restricted to selling the meat for cash or using it in ritual. One of the embarrassments suffered by an anthropologist was being presented with a beast by people who hardly ever killed one for their own use. It was true that a general share-out took place when the beast was killed, but it was none the less one beast fewer in the herd, and it was the maintenance and increase of the herds which was the cattle-owners' chief concern.

This emphasis on numbers rather than quality, which caused so much misunderstanding between government departments and cattle-owners, was closely related to the forms of exchange in cattle. Formerly cattle were handed over either as *lobola* or as penalties for the infringement of laws. Both these forms of transfer continued, but there were additional demands which cattle-owners or potential owners had to be aware of in watching the increase or diminution of their herds. One characteristic of these modern forms of exchange was the ready convertibility of cattle into cash and of cash into cattle. We have seen how young men away at work sent money back to their fathers or fathers' brothers to buy cattle. We have seen too how the possession of cattle made it possible to sell a beast and obtain cash for various purposes, and the proximity of markets where there were butchers' stalls encouraged this sale of cattle.

One of the most frequent reasons for the conversion of cattle into cash was for the purpose of hiring labour. We saw in Chapter I of this section how Lopati Nzunga killed cattle to feed the men who carried bricks and cement for his brother's tomb and sold another beast to pay wages to the bricklayers. The traditional way of paying labourers had been by feeding them with meat, and the modern method was to pay them cash wages and to find the money for it by the sale of cattle. Such labour could be for cultivating, house-building, fence-building, road-making and other local work. The possession of cattle which were easily convertible into cash made possible this payment of labour, and this relationship between the role of cattle-owner and the role of employer of labour was common.

262
272231
262231
437231
464
[465]

174 THE ANCESTOR CULT OF THE NGONI

178 The pressure on the Ngoni to possess ready cash was directly
 231 related to their prestige in the villages and kingdoms, and to the status
 437 of the Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans. Money was needed for good
 554 buildings and good clothing, two of the modern signs of status which
 1453 the Ngoni could not ignore. Faced with this situation, and unwilling,
 except among the urban Ngoni, to invest savings in banks,¹ they manip-
 ulated their cattle tradition to suit the new situation in several ways.
 In place of the frequent slaughter for food, there were occasional sales
 for cash. Money earned in wages was invested in cattle. The drive there-
 fore was all the time to increase the herds, in order to be able to convert
 them into cash when the need arose.

Values and attitudes in cattle-ownership

114 Any attempt to probe below the surface of current practices in acquir-
 233 ing, caring for and using cattle should be preceded by an extensive
 565 survey of cattle-keeping, including the full implications of their place
 in the economy of Ngoni village and family life. Since a complete survey
 is not possible here, the assessment of the values inherent in the owner-
 ship of cattle and the resultant attitudes towards their acquisition and
 use is related in this chapter to the relationships between the living
 Ngoni and their ancestors. These values were primarily those of the
 senior men and women of Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans, and hence
 those of the aristocracy. They were reflected in the attitudes of groups
 who owned cattle in the villages. Further analysis would show varia-
 tions in the attitudes of individual members of those groups who pos-
 sessed cattle, and would also show an approximation to the Ngoni atti-
 tudes by members of other groups, for example, village headmen of
 Ntumba clans whose fathers had journeyed and fought with the Ngoni
 in the past. The spread of cattle-keeping beyond the former exclusive
 monopoly of the leading clans and of leading men in them resulted in
 a number of different attitudes towards the acquisition and use of
 cattle. Some of these variations were suggested earlier in this chapter
 in the brief comparisons of Cewa and Ngoni ownership of cattle.

231 The primary value of cattle to the Ngoni was the security they repre-
 556 sented. This security lay in assurance of social position, in being able
 to meet penalties imposed by the courts, in the potential command of
 labour, in the enjoyment of much prized food, in the performance of
 ritual for the dead and in sacrifices to the ancestors. The converse of
 this security was the fear of losing cattle, and this was primarily a group
 attitude rather than an individual one. A man living in a town who had
 sent money to his father to buy cattle, and who heard that they had
 died, very often shrugged his shoulders when he heard of the loss and

¹ The Ngoni in Blantyre put about half of their savings into banks and sent the rest to their home villages to buy cattle.

an adequate garden for his wife. He may clear a fresh garden on rejuvenated land, or enlarge his own or his wife's garden, depending on how they are placed. It is usually not until much later in the marriage that a man starts a garden of his own, distinct from the one nominally owned by his wife. The work of clearing a new place for a garden is not, among the Ngoni, necessarily a man's job, and can be undertaken by a woman alone if she has no man to assist her. If the husband is present, he does most of the tree felling, and his wife breaks up the new ground with her hoe. 591 241 343 241 462

The planting, weeding, and cultivating are all done by both men and women, and during the wet season a man goes to the garden with his wife early in the morning and they both work there until they are tired. Later, when the growing crop has to be protected against monkeys by day and wild pigs by night, they both spend long hours on watch in the garden shelter. At harvest, both cut down the maize and lift the ground crops, but only the woman can carry the produce to the village. If the man helps, it is by bringing a cart or sledge and taking home a large load pulled by oxen. [492]

In the other subsistence pursuits of animal husbandry and hunting, there is no co-operation between husband and wife until the animals have been killed, when the woman has to cook the meat. Hunting is entirely a male occupation, and animal husbandry largely so. If a man goes away on a journey, he leaves his cattle in charge of his son or brother or father rather than with his wife. If there is no trustworthy man available, then they become his wife's responsibility, but all she in fact does is to see that the senior herdboys reports to her every evening about the state of the beasts. Small stock such as goats and sheep and pigs may be looked after entirely by the wife, and chickens are likely to be in her care. 224 333 462

A man looks to his wife to feed him, and it is considered a reflection on her industry if he does not get enough and has to hang about when his companions are eating in the hope that they will invite him to join them. She feeds him within the exigencies of the food-supply, which often involves semi-starvation in February and March. She is expected to cook competently, and if a woman continually burns the porridge which forms the basis of every meal, there will be strife between her and her husband. If she proves to be a really bad cook her husband may send her home again to be taught properly. 593 262

Beer-brewing is the work of women, and is a process lasting at least six days even after all the correct ingredients have been mustered. There is some variation with status in the extent to which husbands require their wives to brew beer, and it is in any case a matter in which the woman can take the initiative. Important men and chiefs who have many visitors like to be able to offer beer to their guests, so that queens spend much time brewing. But common men need to conserve their food supplies more carefully, and know that their visitors will be disappointed but not surprised if there is no beer. A woman sometimes brews to sell the beer and gain money to buy herself clothes, if her husband has no money to give her. [252] 273 462 [554] [544] [437]